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Source: *The Journal of Race Development*, Vol. 1, No. 3 (Jan., 1911), pp. 302-315

Published by:

Stable URL: <http://www.jstor.org/stable/29737866>

Accessed: 15/07/2014 09:38

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PROBABLE INFLUENCE OF THE TURKISH REVOLUTION ON THE FAITH OF ISLAM

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In the minds of those who brought it about the Turkish Revolution was not in any sense religious. It was political and social. It was a Turkish, not a Mohammedan revolution, designed to save the Empire of the Turks from dismemberment and to restore its power. The Ottoman Turks have ruled this Empire for six hundred years and although they constitute only about one-fifth of the population, although two-thirds of their Mohammedan subjects belong to conquered races, they still expect to maintain their supremacy in a constitutional government. No other race in the Empire is strong enough to take their place and no two or three of them are likely to unite against them. The Turks have always been famous as soldiers and as rulers over conquered races. The small tribe which followed Ertogrul were Moslems when they first appeared in Asia Minor, but the Kingdom which they founded was always governed by political rather than religious motives. Mohammed II, the conqueror of Constantinople, was as far as possible from being a fanatical Mohammedan.

Constantinople has never been the religious centre of the Mohammedan world, and the Turks have never had much influence over Moslem thought even in Turkey. The Arabs look upon them as little better than barbarians, and Islamism is an Arab religion. Mecca is the religious centre of the faith, and Cairo has long been a theological centre. Every year thousands of Moslems from all parts of the world go to Mecca to visit the sacred places and celebrate the festival of Courban Beiram (the feast of sacrifices). Every Moslem is bound to make this pilgrimage at least once in

his life. This annual gathering really constitutes something like a Panislamic Congress where all the interests of the faith are discussed at length by representatives of different countries and where plans are made for its defence and propagation. Little regard is paid there to the authority of the Turkish Caliph. As Sultan he may give to his people a Constitution which recognizes the political equality of Moslems and Christians and the Sheik-ul-Islam at Constantinople may declare that this is not contrary to the Sacred Law, but every Moslem is free to judge for himself whether this new interpretation is to be received or not. It is a new doctrine, contrary to the spirit of Islam, if we can judge of this by the history of Mohammedan governments. We have no reason to suppose that Mecca has condemned the idea of a Constitution or of a parliament, for Mohammedanism is a democratic religion, quite as much so as the most democratic forms of Protestant Christianity, and the immediate successors of the Prophet were chosen by the people. The novelty and heresy of the Turkish Constitution is that it makes no distinction between believers and unbelievers. The parliament which is to make the laws which are binding on Mohammedans and to limit the power of the Caliph is made up of Christians and Jews as well as true believers. If Mecca ever consents to this it will be a revolution, the beginning of a new era in the history of Islam. Thus far the average Moslem would rather live under the worst Mohammedan government than under the best Christian rule. If the Moslem as well as the Christian population received the revolution and the deposition of Abd-ul-Hamid with joy it was not because they approved of the Constitution or even understood what it meant, it was because it freed them from the yoke of a terrible despotism and inspired vague hopes of escape from taxation and all the burdens of life. They soon discovered their mistake and it has been necessary for the leaders of the Young Turk party to employ all possible means to convince them that the religious status of the government is unchanged. The Constitution itself recognizes the Sultan as Caliph and declares that the religion of the Empire is

Islamism. The great majority of the members of Parliament are Moslems and a large number are of the Ulema. It is assumed that no law can be passed which is contrary to the *Sheriat* (sacred law) and all discussions take this into consideration. There is no evidence that the present government would regard the public profession of Christianity by a Moslem with any more favor than that of Abd-ul-Hamid. On the whole the government has been more successful in conciliating the Moslems of different races than the Christians. The Greeks especially have adopted a policy which is calculated to rouse the fanaticism of the Moslems against them and which makes it very difficult for the Young Turks to carry out their plans and fulfil their promises. What the Greeks dream of and aim at is not the reformation of the Turkish Empire but its destruction.

A brief statement of the above facts has seemed necessary to make it clear that the Turkish revolution was not designed in any way to influence Moslems to abandon their faith or to weaken the general power and progress of Islam in the world. On the other hand the Young Turks have publicly, in the Turkish newspapers of Constantinople, repudiated all sympathy for the political intrigues of Pan-Islamism and have put down by force the latest Mahdi movement in Arabia. Their one aim has been to save the Turkish Empire. Revolutions with this end in view have been frequent in the history of the Ottoman Empire. The peculiarity of *this* revolution was that it set aside the Oriental despotism which has ruled for six hundred years and established a limited monarchy and representative government modeled after the modern governments of Europe, to be based upon principles of liberty, justice, equality and fraternity. The people are to rule through their chosen representatives and all the people, of whatever race or religion, are to have a part in the government with equal rights and equal duties. There is no doubt of the sincerity of the leaders of the revolution, and they have done their best to establish such a government. The Sultan has heartily accepted the new regime. The country is governed to-day by a Parliament chosen by the people, in which there has been free discus-

sion of all political questions. The government is supported by the army and there is reason to believe that it will weather the storms which threaten it.

The question is, what influence it has had or is likely to have upon the faith of Islam in Turkey and in the Moslem world.

If we answer this question in a general way in the light of History it does not appear that change of government or political revolutions tend to change the religious faith of the people. The Christian world has been too ready to believe that when the political power of Mohammedanism was destroyed it would gradually disappear. Most of the Moslems in the world are now under the rule of Christian states, but as a religious force Islamism was probably never stronger than it is now. There have been comparatively few conversions to Christianity under the rule of England, France, or Russia, and none, so far as I know, in the Balkan states. It is generally true that the people of a conquered state do not forsake their religion to adopt the faith of their conquerors unless they are compelled to do so by force. This is an historical fact. The many revolutions which have been made in the name of Liberty, Equality and Fraternity during the last one hundred and twenty years have certainly had an influence upon the religious life and faith of the people, but they have not in any state led the people to change from one established faith to another, as from Catholicism to Protestantism or the reverse. The most that can be said is, that in Europe they have opened the way for a greater freedom in propagating all forms of belief and unbelief, and have favored the progress of learning and the general enlightenment of the people. The revolution in Japan has been altogether exceptional. There has been nothing like it in the history of the world. It was purely political and most of the results have been political, but among other Western ideas it adopted the principle of full religious liberty and although the mass of the people cling to its old faiths, the way has been opened for a Christian propaganda which has now many converts. No such results can be hoped for in the Mohammedan world, which was

originally anti-Christian and has been in close relation with Christianity during all its history. Between Islam and Christianity there are thirteen centuries of conflict and seas of blood. It is hard for a Moslem even to think of the possibility of crossing this abyss, and the Christian world has done very little to win them over. There is a general awakening in the Mohammedan world of which we know but little except in its outward movements, in the revolutions in Turkey and Persia, in the unrest manifested in India, Northern Africa and even among the Moslems in China. It seems to be due in some measure to the general awakening of Asia since the triumph of Japan over Russia, and it is certain that it does not imply any inclination on the part of Moslems to abandon their faith.

What the most liberal of the Young Turks desire and anticipate, is that Mohammedanism in the Ottoman Empire at least, may be modernized and brought into sympathy with the spirit of the age, at least so far that it can take advantage of the general material progress of the world. They hope to rival Japan and overtake the foremost nations of Europe and they believe that European ideas of civilization can be grafted on to the faith of Islam without weakening its hold upon the true believers. They look back upon the glories of Bagdad and Cordova, when Europe was sunk in the darkness of the Middle Ages, and those two Moslem cities with their rival Caliphs were the centres of light and learning in the world, and when Greek philosophy found its way into Europe through Arabic translations. These lights were not put out by the Moslems. Bagdad was destroyed by Hulagoo who was at least half a Christian and who offered to ally himself with the Crusaders against the Saracens. Cordova was destroyed by the most "Christian" sovereign of Spain. Renan has shown that these wonderful developments of learning were neither Moslem nor Arab in their spirit or origin, but after all they existed under the patronage of Moslem Caliphs, when Christian civilization could show nothing to compare with them and it is natural that Moslems should be proud of them and believe in the possibility of a revival of learning among Mohammedans in this age.

The Young Turks have another ground of hope in the fact that Islamism admits of a great variety of beliefs on all sorts of questions. There are hundreds of Moslem sects and it is very difficult for a Christian to discover exactly what is essential to the faith. The name Islam means simply, resignation to the will of God. A distinguished Moslem statesman and scholar once assured me that nothing was essential beyond a belief in the existence and unity of God. Several years ago the Sheik-ul-Islam, the highest authority in Constantinople, in a letter to a German inquirer, which was published in the newspapers in the city, stated that "whoever confesses that there is but one God and that Mohammed is his prophet, is a *true* Moslem, although to be a *good* one it is necessary to observe the five points of confession, prayer, fasting, almsgiving and pilgrimage." The confession of faith laid down in the Koran is more explicit, but admits of wide difference of opinion. "I believe in God, in the Angels, in the Books, in the Prophets, in the Judgment day, in the Eternal decrees of God Almighty concerning both good and evil, and in the Resurrection after death." There are Moslems who are mystics, hard to be distinguished from the old Christian mystics. There are rationalists of all sorts, there are Deists, like the old English Deists, there are pantheists of the Spinoza type, there are followers of Spencer and other modern philosophers. One of the most interesting books written by a Moslem has been translated into English and is well worth reading. It is called, "*The Spirit of Islam*." It was written by Justice Ameer Aali, a distinguished Judge in India, and represents the ordinary belief of Mohammedans about as accurately as Renan's *Life of Jesus* represents Orthodox Christianity.

There is nothing in the ethical code of Islam which is theoretically inconsistent with Christian civilization. According to Omar Nessafi, a high and ancient authority, it demands:

Honesty in business: Modesty or Decency in behaviour: Fraternity between all Moslems: Benevolence and kindness toward all creatures. It forbids gambling, some kinds of music, the making or possessing of images, the taking of God's name in vain,

the drinking of intoxicating liquors and all false oaths. The Moslem must avoid all that is contrary to religion, law, humanity, good manners and the duties of society. He ought especially to guard against deception, lying, slander and abuse of his neighbor.

The Koran is full of exhortation to righteousness and denunciations of wrong as well as of enigmatical passages which admit of the most unexpected interpretations. Until it was so explained by the Sheik-ul-Islam, no one had ever dreamed that the one hundredth verse of the third Sura approved of constitutional and parliamentary government, with equal rights for all. The latest English translation of this passage is, "that there may be among you a people who invite to the good and enjoin the just and forbid the wrong. These are they with whom it shall be well."

Theoretically there seems to be no reason why the Young Turks should not succeed in establishing and maintaining a Mohammedan government on the liberal Constitutional lines which they have laid down, notwithstanding the fact that this will necessitate a radical reform in Islam.

Practically the obstacles to be overcome are many and formidable, and they cannot hope for much sympathy from the reform movements which are now at work in Arabia and Africa. Neither the Wahabites who are still influential, nor the Sennusi, the Jesuits of Islam, desire to modernize the faith. Their watchword is, "Back to the Prophet and the Koran." In Turkey itself they have to contend not only with racial antipathies, but with ignorance, superstition and fanaticism, which is deeply rooted in the life of the people, whose faith is based, not upon the Koran, but upon tradition and the teaching of the Imam Hanife. There are millions in Arabia and Kurdistan who have made no progress towards civilization since the time of the Prophet.

The Turkish revolution was brought about by the army, and this is still its chief defence and support, but the Young Turks formed their hopes of success first of all upon the education of the people, which they hope to bring about not only by schools and the press, but by the system of Parliamentary government, which will make the people acquainted

with what is going on in the world as well as with their own rights and duties as citizens. They are also reforming the Theological schools on modern principles. They have abolished the religious character of the army by the conscription of Moslems and Christians on the same terms. They are trying to introduce such material improvements as will add to the prosperity of the country and at the same time familiarize the people with the discoveries and inventions of modern times.

These are all wise and liberal measures, but it will be long generations perhaps, before they can have much influence over the masses of the people. It is only a little more than a year since the government passed under the control of the Young Turks and it is only in Constantinople and some of the larger cities that we can find any evidence of the impression which they have made upon the Moslem population and the religious hierarchy. Even in these cities the conflict with the Greeks, political complications with foreign powers and financial questions have absorbed the attention of the people, so that we have very few accomplished facts to depend upon in forming any judgment as to the probable influence of the revolution upon the faith of Islam even in the Turkish Empire. We cannot be certain that the political result will be permanent, whether the present government will continue to control the army and thus maintain its power or what would follow if it is overthrown. There are both reactionary and radical conspiracies against it, but certain changes have already taken place in the minds of intelligent Moslems which are important and probably will be permanent. They realize as never before that some sort of reform on modern lines must be attempted if Islam is to regain its political influence in the world, that it must adapt itself to the progressive civilization of Europe and America. There is a new appreciation of the necessity of a general education of the people and a higher education for those who are to be leaders. This feeling has been growing for fifty years, but it has been raised to a conviction by the revolution. Not only is the government doing everything in its power to found schools, but the foreign Christian

schools and colleges are crowded with Moslem students sent to them and paid for by their parents.

Another and equally striking change is the readiness to emancipate woman from the low place which she holds in the teaching of the Koran and the traditions, and give her a position similar to that which she holds in Christian society. Women took an active and important part in the revolution and the Young Turks have laid stress upon the fact that the education and general elevation of women is essential to the existence of free government and social regeneration. One of the most extraordinary events which has happened in Constantinople during the past year related to two Princesses, nieces of Abd-ul-Hamid, They were sent from Salonica by the Ex-Sultan to be married and husbands were assigned to them in the usual fashion. They refused to submit to this and sent a protest to the Turkish newspapers against this invasion of the rights of woman. It was published, with the result that the Princesses were allowed to select their husbands.

The American College for Girls has become a center of enlightenment, not only for its students, some of whom are supported by the Government, but also for Turkish women who come in crowds to listen to lectures on hygiene and other practical questions. Some very able articles have appeared in the newspapers written by Moslem women on their rights and duties.

The women of Constantinople have, in general, shown much wisdom in adapting themselves to the new order of things. They have boldly asserted their rights, but they have avoided any such abandonment of the social conventionalities of Turkish life as would shock the less intelligent Moslems.

If this new awakening of the women themselves and the general feeling among leading men of the necessity of educating and elevating the women goes on, it must end in the abandonment of polygamy, slavery and the present laws of divorce.

It is not easy to judge how far the Moslems have accepted the liberal principles of the Constitution, which recognize

the full equality of Moslems and Christians, with freedom of the press, freedom of speech and religious freedom for all. For the fanatical masses these principles mean nothing. For them the Christian is still a dog, a pig, an infidel destined to hell fire in the world to come, but in the cities there are evidences of change, in the Parliament the Christian members had nothing to complain of, and in the life of the people there has been more of mutual respect and friendly relationship. Large numbers of Moslems have attended special services in Christian churches, they have united with Christians and Jews in mixed political organizations. Even in the present bitter conflict with the Greeks, the Turkish press does not abuse them as Christians, but confines itself to the political questions involved in the controversy.

A few months since a friend of mine who could speak some Turkish visited Constantinople and had an experience there which might have cost him his life a few years ago. He went to one of the great mosques just at the time of the noon prayers and, at the invitation of an Imam, he joined the line of worshippers and remained there through the whole service. He was treated with the greatest respect and not one of the motley crowd manifested any ill-feeling at his presence there.

The wild enthusiasm of which we heard so much two years ago, with its picturesque fraternizing of Imams and priests, has of course passed away. It was prompted by the escape of all alike from the terrible tyranny of Abd-ul-Hamid, but I hear of many instances of friendly relations and even of amicable religious discussions between Moslems and Christians in different parts of the country. There is certainly some softening of the fanatical and contemptuous spirit with which Moslems have been accustomed to treat the Christians, something more than a mere recognition of their legal rights under the Constitution.

All of these changes in Turkey, the new desire for modern education, the movement for the emancipation of women, the recognition of the rights of Christians and the more liberal and kindly feeling for them are the direct results of the political changes brought about by the revolution.

How far these changes will permanently modify the spirit of Islam in Turkey will depend upon the success of the Young Turks in maintaining their power and carrying out their principles. If they fail a violent reaction is possible.

It is too soon to form any definite opinion as to the influence of the Turkish revolution upon Moslems in other parts of the world. The Turkish race has never had much influence over the religious thought of the Mohammedan world. The Sultan is only a self-appointed, *defacto* Caliph and has no such authority as the Pope of Rome, to determine the dogmas or the forms of religion. The only results of the revolution which have thus far appeared have been rather political than religious. In Egypt and Algiers the people have been excited by what they have heard of the change in Turkey, but these political movements have not attracted the sympathy of the Young Turks. It is not for their interest to put an end to English and French rule in North Africa or to do anything to increase the influence of the Arabs.

The revolution in Persia, the land of endless religious unrest, preceded that in Turkey and no one can foresee what its influence will be upon the Shiite branch of Islam, or how far it may be influenced by the movement in Turkey. The most interesting religious movement in Persia is the progress of what is known as Bahaism which has won many converts not only in Persia but even in Europe and the United States. It claims to be a world religion which is to reform Christianity as well as Mohammedanism.

It is in India that we find the most important Moslem community in the world. There are more than sixty million there under British rule. They are of many races and of various degrees of civilization but welded together by their common faith in Islam.

As a rule they are not fanatical or aggressive against Christianity. Their hostility is chiefly directed against the idolatrous Hindus. They have long been loyal to the English government and the present threatening attitude of the Hindus has rather strengthened their loyalty. It seems certain that they are to play a more important part in India

than they have at any time since it came under English rule, and their leaders, some of whom are highly educated and distinguished men, are realizing, as never before, that their people must shake off the conservative complacency of Islamism and wake up to the progress of the world if they are to hold their own against the Hindus.

The revolution in Turkey has come in good time to strengthen the hands of these reformers, and it is possible that the reform movement in India may be more radical than in Turkey.

There is one other question which, as Christians, we cannot fail to ask. Will the Turkish revolution and the general awakening of the Mohammedan world to a sense of its political weakness and its need of reform incline Moslems to abandon Islam and accept the Christian faith? I think that I have already made it clear that every Moslem would unhesitatingly answer this question in the negative. I am of the same opinion. These movements will have no such *direct* influence. *Indirectly* they are likely to bring Moslems to a better knowledge of their own religion and to open the way for them to learn what Christianity is. Most Moslems have a very imperfect knowledge of the character of the Prophet or the teaching of the Koran. They assign to him offices and qualities which he never claimed for himself, such as sinlessness, pre-existence, the working of miracles, the office of mediator between God and man. They accept the one great truth which he proclaimed of our responsibility to one omnipresent, omnipotent God, but on the other side the religion of most of them is terribly human and accommodates itself to the passions of men.

It is true that Christians as well as Moslems have tortured and massacred their fellow-men in the name of God, and there is no Moslem atrocity which could not be matched in Christian history, but there is this essential difference, no justification for unrighteousness of any kind can be found in the life or teaching of Jesus Christ. No excuse for any of the crimes which are so common in Christian lands. While the Moslem, on the other hand, is always ready to find an excuse for his evil deeds in the acts of the Prophet himself,

as well as in the teaching of the Traditions. The most essential difference in the two religions is that the Christian finds his ideal in Jesus Christ while the Moslem finds his in Mohammed,

Very few Moslems have read the New Testament or know anything of Christ except the laudatory but incorrect references to him in the Koran. Their ideas of Christian doctrine are imperfect and often absurd, as for example, their belief that the three persons of the Christian Trinity are God, Jesus Christ and the Virgin Mary. Unfortunately their acquaintance with Christians has done nothing to convince them of the superiority of Christianity as a practical religion. They have failed to learn from their relations with the Oriental churches and from their contact with Christian Powers that Christianity teaches a purer morality than Mohammedanism. The more intelligent of them are ready to recognize the material and intellectual progress of the Christian nations and to adapt their religion to it, but of the true spirit of Christianity they know but little, and they are not likely to learn much about it unless it is represented to them as it was represented to the Japanese by Christian Missionaries. Moslems are generally ready to discuss religious questions in a friendly way. In fact it is easier for them to talk about religion than anything else, it occupies so large a place in their lives. They have no objection to reading the Holy Scriptures. Many copies are sold to them every year. We had evidence a few years ago that they were also ready to read controversial treatises. A large consignment of a famous attack upon Mohammedanism in the Turkish language was seized and confiscated in the Constantinople Custom House. The books were not destroyed and one by one they were carried off by Moslems until in a short time they were all in circulation and were a subject of general discussion. But it is not by controversy or by attack of any kind that Moslems are to be brought to such a knowledge of the spirit of Christianity as will lead them to see in Jesus Christ the Divine Savior of the world. They must see His life reflected in the lives of those who represent Him and learn from a comparison of

the Koran with the Gospels that whatever of truth there is in Islam, it is in Christ rather than in the Prophet of Mecca that we find the way, the truth and the life.

It is not to be supposed that the Mohammedan world will welcome the coming of Christian Missionaries. However much it may appreciate the material progress of Christendom, it has no desire to be converted to Christianity; but Islam is itself a missionary faith which sends its missionaries to the ends of the earth, and intelligent Moslems need not be surprised or offended if we take advantage of their present awakening to send missionaries to present to them the claims of Christianity to be the one true faith.

The European Powers in their own political interest have hastened to offer to Turkey their sympathy and material support. England has loaned them an Admiral to reform their navy. Germany has sent generals to discipline their army. Italy, officers to organize their police, and France experienced officials to regulate their finance. American capitalists are preparing to spend millions to build their railways. I believe that the more thoughtful Moslems would think it strange if the Christian Church, with its mission to carry the Gospel of Christ to all nations, did not improve this opportunity to offer them their spiritual aid in leading them to a better knowledge of Divine truth.